

## **SAFE SCHOOLS: A HEALTH AND SAFETY CHECK**

### **A MANUAL OF CHECKLISTS COVERING ENVIRONMENTAL, HEALTH AND SAFETY REGULATIONS FOR SECONDARY OCCUPATIONAL AND CAREER ORIENTATION PROGRAMS IN NEW JERSEY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

You are an administrator, safety and health coordinator, or a teacher at a secondary school with vocational education programs. You know your school needs to comply with environmental, health and safety regulations, but the task seems overwhelming. You may not have much experience with occupational safety and health concerns, but your busy schedule doesn't give you many opportunities to learn more. It feels like every time you turn around, a new regulation has been issued. Who has time to get a copy of it, let alone read it! When you finally do get a chance to read a regulation, you find you have lots of questions, but who do you contact for answers? Your school's last compliance inspection could have gone better, but you're not sure what you can do to make future visits go more smoothly. On top of everything else, the newly revised New Jersey Annotated Code (N.J.A.C.) 6:53 "Vocational Education Safety and Health Standards" requires that your school perform a safety and health hazard analysis for every vocational course or program in operation. What do you do?

Use Safe Schools: A Health and Safety Check, A Manual of Checklists Covering Environmental, Health and Safety Regulations for Secondary Occupational and Career Orientation Programs in New Jersey Public Schools. This manual was designed by New Jersey vocational educators for New Jersey vocational educators. It will make your job easier by helping you:

- ! Find out which federal and state agencies regulate environmental, safety and health in vocational education programs;
- ! Identify specific regulations that apply to New Jersey public secondary school vocational classrooms, shops, and labs (only the regulations that pertain to settings on school grounds are addressed);
- ! Set up a checklist program that will assist teachers in doing a safety and health hazard analysis for each classroom, shop, and lab (each checklist is designed to correspond to specific environmental, safety, and health regulations so you will also be able to determine whether or not you are in compliance);

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- ! Prepare for and participate in compliance inspections;
- ! Help students learn about regulations pertinent to particular classrooms, shops, and labs, processes, and activities and the benefits of using checklists to determine compliance;
- ! Detect areas that need improvement in the school's total environmental, safety and health program; and
- ! Find sources for more information about regulations, technical assistance, and educational materials;

### OVERVIEW OF THE SAFE SCHOOLS MANUAL

At a first glance, the size of the Safe Schools manual can seem a bit overwhelming. That is because of the large number of checklists that had to be developed to cover all of the regulations applicable to vocational school settings! However, you'll find that the format of the manual will make it surprisingly easy to use. There are four chapters and several supporting appendices. Each chapter builds on the preceding one to help you develop a workable plan for implementing a checklist program.

**Chapter 1 - Making Sense Out of Regulations**, gives background information concerning the regulatory agencies and regulations that are applicable to vocational education. **Chapter 2 - How to Establish an Effective Environmental, Safety, and Health Program** outlines ways for school personnel to ensure that an effective program is instituted and maintained. **Chapter 3 - Implementing a Checklist Program** describes how to implement a checklist program to identify hazards and determine regulatory compliance. Special indexes listing the checklists by name, vocational program and hazard will help you select which checklists to use for each vocational course or program. This chapter also provides a case study of a real school's checklist program. Handouts are included for teacher training in the use of the checklists. **Chapter 4 - Checklists** contains the checklists.

**Appendices** are provided as references for additional information or help. **Appendix A: Resources** gives descriptions and contact information for regulatory agencies, professional organizations, and other occupational safety and health groups. **Appendix B: Using Safe Schools to Teach Students About Occupational Safety and Health** suggests ways

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to use the checklists with students and discusses other educational resources. **Appendix C: Tips for Making an Inspection a Cooperative Rather Than an Adversarial Experience** offers strategies for preparing for inspections from regulatory agencies. **Appendix D: Emergency Procedures in Public Secondary Schools in the Event of a Chemical Spill** describes planning regulations pertaining to emergency response. **Appendix E: Text of Selected Regulations** contains some of the regulations that apply to vocational programs, including N.J.A.C. 6:53 (Vocational Education Safety and Health Standards).

## COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Below are some of the most commonly asked questions that participants raised during the development of the Safe Schools manual:

### **How did the Safe Schools manual come about?**

The New Jersey Department of Education/Office of School-to-Career and College Initiatives (formerly called the Division of Adult and Occupational Education) conducted a survey among vocational administrators, educators, and state personnel about their health and safety needs. They heard over and over again that schools were having trouble keeping up with regulatory compliance and that they lacked tools, information, and technical assistance to carry out their responsibilities. Thus the Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences Institute (EOHSI) developed the Safe Schools manual in direct response to the needs expressed in the survey, through a grant from the New Jersey Department of Education. A special task force was formed to give guidance to the project and the manual was field tested in several New Jersey schools to ensure the best possible product.

### **Are the checklists mandatory? Why should my school use them?**

The completion of the checklists in and of themselves is not mandatory but they are recommended as one tool that can greatly increase your school's ability to maintain a classroom that is safe for teachers and students. It is mandatory to have a safety and health program in place, to conduct a hazard analysis for each vocational course or program, to do periodic inspections and maintenance, and to comply with safety and health regulations. The checklists can assist in carrying out these mandates.

### **Are the checklists all I need for a safety and health program at my school?**

Self-inspection checklists should be considered only one of many elements that need to be in place to protect people and the environment. Other essential elements include: management commitment, employee and student training and involvement, student safety and health competency testing, established procedures to follow in an emergency, and a coordinated effort to eliminate any hazards that are found. Many of these topics are discussed in **Chapter 2 - How to Establish an Effective Environmental, Safety and Health Program**. Suggestions for involving students are covered in **Appendix B: Using Safe Schools to Teach Students About Occupational Safety and Health**.

### **Do the checklists cover all of the hazards in my program?**

The checklists were developed only for hazards covered by current State and federal regulations. It was beyond the scope of this project to include checklists for unregulated environmental, safety and health hazards. A vocational program or course may still contain hazards, even if all of the checklists indicate good compliance. For example, as of this writing, there are no regulations pertaining to the use of video display terminals. However, VDT operators can suffer a number of ergonomics-related problems if safe practices are not followed. In **Appendix A: Resources**, an effort was made to locate resources for additional information on some of the hazards not covered by regulations.

### **Do the checklists deal with environmental, safety and health regulations applicable to the whole school?**

The checklists only address environmental, safety and health regulations that are **directly related to vocational classroom programs and courses**. For example, the Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act of 1986 (AHERA) regulations issued by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) covering management of asbestos-containing materials in schools are not addressed in this manual (although checklists and regulations pertaining to asbestos in brake linings are covered). These regulations are certainly relevant to schools in general, but are not directly related to vocational programs and courses. On the other hand, the hazardous waste disposal and electrical checklists and others can be used in other programs and classrooms.

### **Do the checklists cover cooperative education off school grounds?**

The checklists only cover environmental, safety and health regulations that are applicable to **public vocational classroom settings on school grounds**. Non-

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school, non-classroom situations and locations, such as cooperative education programs at the worksite, are not covered because they are private workplaces and therefore not within the jurisdiction of the regulations for public schools. For example, the cooperative education situation would be covered by the United States Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Hazard Communication regulations, which apply only to private worksites. However, an understanding of the regulations covered in the Safe Schools manual will certainly acquaint cooperative education instructors and students with the types of issues they should be concerned about in the private workplace. (It should also be noted that many PEOSH regulations were adopted verbatim from OSHA standards.)

### **Do the checklists cover science classes and adult vocational education classes?**

Although important safety and health regulations need to be considered in adult vocational education classes and science classes, it was beyond the scope of this project to do so. It is hoped that they can be covered in separate manuals.

### **If I don't identify any problems when I use the checklists to evaluate my classroom, will I be in compliance with all federal, state, and municipal regulations?**

Municipal regulations were not included because they will be different for each community. An effort was made to make the checklists as comprehensive as possible, without being excessively long and cumbersome. As a result, the fine details of some regulations have been generalized or consolidated. In addition, constant changes in regulations, legitimate differences in interpretation, court decisions, and unanticipated circumstances prevent any self-inspection checklists from guaranteeing compliance with all federal and State regulations.

## AN ONGOING PROCESS

Helping your school maintain regulatory compliance is a big job, even if you rely heavily on the Safe Schools manual. Periodically the New Jersey Department of Education/Office of School-to-Career and College Initiatives plans to hold workshops to help you get your school's checklist program off the ground. In addition, future considerations include:

- !** Computerizing the checklists to make them easier for schools to modify to their particular setting;

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- ! Developing an update service to keep the Safe Schools checklists current;
- ! Starting a statewide network for people who are responsible for environmental, safety and health issues in their schools. This would provide opportunities for sharing information, ideas, and strategies for maintaining safety and health in vocational education programs.
- ! Workshops to address occupational safety and health issues identified through the use of the checklists.

To ensure that Safe Schools continues to meet the needs of New Jersey vocational educators, we invite and encourage you to return the feedback form included in the front of the manual and to call or write to us with your suggestions, comments and questions. Contact Barry Schlegel, Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences Institute, Public Education and Risk Communication Division, 681 Frelinghuysen Rd., P.O. Box 1179, Piscataway, NJ, 08855-1179, phone: (732) 235-5129; fax: (732) 235-5133.